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TRUMP TAKES A STEP TOWARD LIBERTY

THE RECLASSIFICATION OF MARIJUANA

President Trump recently signed an executive order that transitions the classification of marijuana under the Controlled Substances Act from Schedule I to Schedule III. By definition, Schedule I is intended for exceptionally dangerous drugs that carry a high potential for abuse and offer no recognized medical purpose. However, marijuana is fundamentally less addictive and potentially safer than alcohol, a fact recognized by the 40 states that have already legalized its medicinal use for various ailments.

IMPACT ON RESEARCH AND COMMERCE

This reclassification does not repeal the federal laws that criminalize marijuana use, but it does provide significant practical advantages. It facilitates expanded scientific research into the medical benefits of the substance and allows marijuana businesses operating legally under state laws to claim standard tax deductions. While these developments represent progress, those dedicated to the advancement of liberty should continue to advocate for the total repeal of all federal drug laws.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND MORAL ARGUMENTS

The United States Constitution does not grant the federal government the authority to outlaw marijuana or any other illicit substance. During the era of alcohol prohibition, proponents understood that a constitutional amendment was required to impose a national ban; no such authority exists for the current war on drugs.

Furthermore, the government lacks a moral mandate to prevent adults from engaging in peaceful, though perhaps unwise, behaviors such as smoking marijuana. Laws that prohibit drug use are based on the flawed premise that individual rights are gifts from the government, contingent upon good behavior. If the state can control an individual's choice to use marijuana, it can logically extend that power to mandate vaccines or dictate how children are educated.

THE COST OF PROHIBITION

The ongoing war on drugs has frequently served as a justification for systemic violations of civil liberties, including unconstitutional searches and seizures, no-knock raids, and draconian mandatory minimum sentences. It has also been used to validate foreign interventions and intrusive financial monitoring, such as requiring banks to report large cash deposits to the federal government.

Defenders of these policies often argue that prohibition is necessary because the drug trade is managed by violent criminals. However, this violence is an inevitable consequence of outlawing a product that citizens wish to consume. In a free society, individuals must remain responsible for the consequences of their own choices.

A PRO-LIBERTY APPROACH

Efforts to combat drug use should belong to families, churches, and community persuasion rather than the police state. During my 1996 congressional campaign, I maintained a position that was not pro-drug, but pro-liberty, arguing that the federal government lacks the authority to outlaw drugs and that the resulting police state threatens the freedom of all citizens.

The public has often been ahead of politicians in recognizing the failures of the drug war. Those who value individual rights must oppose these mandates and work toward the ultimate goal: a complete end to federal drug prohibition. Replacing punishment with a respect for individual rights is the only path consistent with a free society.